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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4535  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7207  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5613  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2929  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 1441  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5940  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7288  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7998  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 003066

SENSITIVE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: RAJASTHAN STATE ELECTIONS: IT'S ANYONE'S GAME

REF: NEW DELHI 2969

11. (SBU) Summary: As Rajasthan votes to elect a new assembly on December 4, it is unclear as to which of the two state's main parties - the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or the Congress Party - would get the nod of the voters to form the next state government. Both these parties have had to stave off internal bickering. Despite spiraling inflation and the more recent terror attacks in Mumbai, local issues dominated the campaign. Typically, caste issues play a significant part in deciding the fate of the parties. The presence of a third party, the Dalit-based Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), could complicate matters. Pundits are unwilling to predict the outcome as the Mumbai terror attacks have injected a great deal of uncertainty into voter behavior, although a few have stuck their neck out and called a hung assembly with neither the BJP nor Congress in a position to win on its own.  
End Summary.

12. (U) On December 4, voters in Rajasthan, India's largest state by area, cast their votes to elect a new state assembly. Over 36 million people are eligible to vote for 200 seats in the assembly. Nearly 2,200 candidates contested the elections. The results will be declared on December 8, along with those of other states that have gone to the polls in recent days. The state is currently ruled by a BJP government led by Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje. The BJP won 120 of the 200 seats in the last election in 2003 with the Congress finishing a poor second with 53 seats.

Development: Blaming Delhi is BJP Mantra  
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13. (U) Since 1977, Rajasthan has never voted in any one party for two consecutive terms. The BJP is hoping that this anti-incumbency jinx would be broken this time around. The BJP is campaigning heavily on its development record of the past five years. In addition, the party has blamed the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in Delhi for high inflation. Terrorism, which was not a significant issue despite bomb blasts in Jaipur earlier this year, was suddenly on everyone's mind after the November 26-29 Mumbai attacks. While chances are that the Congress

Party, as the incumbent in Delhi, will suffer because of the Mumbai attacks, the extent of the damage is uncertain. Chief Minister Raje, the first woman chief minister of the state, is hoping that her appeal to the women voters of the state would work its magic just as it did in 2003.

#### Corruption, Lack of Development - Congress Buzz Words

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¶4. (U) The Congress Party is hoping that the anti-incumbency factor, always strong in Indian elections, would work against the BJP. It has largely focused its campaign on the lack of adequate development and the perceived corruption of the Chief Minister and her cabinet colleagues. The party argues that in the name of development, Raje had turned large tracts of agricultural land into commercial land for projects that might never see the light of day and in return Raje and her cabinet colleagues have received huge kickbacks. To counter Raje's appeal amongst women, the Congress Party has pointed out that the last five years has seen a sharp increase in the number of shops selling alcohol thereby leading to greater alcoholism amongst the male population.

#### Internal Bickering - Bane of Both

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¶5. (U) While both try to play it down, the BJP and the Congress have each been badly affected by internal dissention. Senior BJP leaders like former Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and state party president Lalit Chaturvedi have stayed away from the campaign due to differences with Raje.

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In an effort to present a new face for the party, the BJP denied tickets to more than half (61) of its sitting legislators. The BJP has also had to face the loss of two senior caste leaders Vishwendra Singh of the Jats (an agrarian caste) and Kirori Lal Meena, arguably the most prominent leader of the Meenas (a scheduled tribe). While Singh has joined the Congress party, Meena is contesting the elections as an independent. Many of them are now either fighting as independents or as Congress Party candidates.

¶6. (U) The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu nationalist organization that is the BJP's mother organization and which provides crucial campaign support for the BJP, is unhappy with Raje. It appears to have kept away from the campaigning except in about 20 seats where people closely associated with the organization are contesting. The RSS pull-back could prove to be a determining factor in many tight races.

¶7. (U) The Congress Party suffers, as it did in Karnataka, from not having projected one single popular state leader as its chief ministerial candidate. The perceived chief ministerial candidate for the party is Ashok Gehlot, who was the chief minister of the state from 1998-2003. But, his image suffers because Delhi has not formally anointed him. Out of the Congress Party's 200 candidates, 116 candidates owe their allegiance to Gehlot. This has prompted his rivals within the party to stay away from the campaign, and perhaps work against the party.

#### Identity Politic Reigns Supreme

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¶8. (U) While development, internal bickering, inflation and terrorism are issues that matter, caste remains supreme in Rajasthan politics. As in past elections, the way various ethnic/caste communities vote is likely to determine the fate of the candidates. Traditionally the Rajputs (princely caste) have voted for the BJP while the Jats have sided with the Congress party. In 2003, the Jats switched allegiance to the BJP and helped the party topple the incumbent Congress Party. This time around, the Jats seem to be divided between the Congress and the BJP.

¶9. (U) The other sizable communities like the Meenas and the Gujjars also seem to be divided down the middle. Some sections of the Meenas, who have enjoyed favored treatment by Raje now fear that, if elected for a second term, she would extend more affirmative action programs for their rivals, the Gujjars. The Gujjars, who had earlier this year launched a bloody agitation to win job and educational preferences for their community, also seem to be divided on their support for Raje. While they supported her in 2003 after she promised them the quota, many have turned away from her because they felt compelled to engage in bloody protests which claimed 16 Gujjar lives before she granted them the enhanced quotas.

#### Mayawati Plays a Big Hand

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¶10. (U) The aggressive entry of Dalit-based Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati has added a new dimension to the contest in Rajasthan. The BSP contested 124 seats in 2003 and won 2 of them. This time around the party is contesting 199 seats and hopes to win at least 8-10 seats. In the last five years, the BSP has gained support in north India, wresting power in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh in 2007 and making a strong bid to gain some seats in the Delhi state assembly. (Note: Delhi voters went to the polls on November 29; results of will be released alongside Rajasthan's on December 8.) If the BSP is able to work its magical social coalition of the upper caste and dalits, then it could hurt the chances of both the BJP and the Congress in many seats. Political

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observers, however, opine that the BSP may at best win about 5 seats. What it might end up doing is drawing enough votes from Congress candidates to tip the seat towards the BJP.

#### It is All Local

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¶11. (U) In the end, like always, Rajasthan elections will be decided primarily on local issues. Senior journalist and keen Rajasthan-watcher Rohit Parihar commented that this time around the voting would be based on each candidate's caste and the local equations. Parihar told Poloff that in his 20 years of following Rajasthan politics, he had not seen an election campaign that was so fractured and region specific. He elaborated that each region of the state seemed to have its own particular local issues on which the campaigning focused. Hindu Rajasthan Bureau Chief Sunny Sebastian agreed, saying that this the Rajasthan voter seems to have turned his/her back on the many burning national issues.

#### Comment: Mumbai Attacks

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¶12. (SBU) The impact of the Mumbai terror attacks on voter preferences is likely to be highest among the urban middle class. Since Rajasthan is primarily a rural state with few large urban concentrations, the Congress Party is likely to suffer less damage in this state as a consequence of the attacks than in other, more urban states. Before the attacks, the BJP and the Congress were in a tight contest. Should the BJP sweep back into power by a wide margin, it will mean that the Mumbai attacks have had a deeper and broader impact on voter perceptions of the Congress-led UPA government in Delhi.

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